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DRAMATIC SCENE AND *THE AWKWARD AGE*

BY EBEN BASS

THE "CABALISTIC" diagram of *The Awkward Age* (1899) whereby James explained the novel to its original publisher (*Harper's Weekly*) comprised "the neat figure of a circle consisting of a number of small rounds disposed at equal distance about a central object. The central object was my situation, my subject in itself, to which the thing would owe its title, and the small rounds represented so many distinct lamps, as I liked to call them, the function of each of which would be to light with all due intensity one of its aspects."¹ Each of the "lamps" was a "single social occasion" in which James proceeded to exhaust, as he says, the scenic possibilities; the "occasions" corresponded, he continues, to "Acts of a Play," and his purpose in using them as a basis of form was to achieve "objectivity" that required no "going behind" scenes to explain, as fiction so often does, and as drama does not. "To make the presented occasion tell all its story itself" was then his purpose (*AN*, p. 111). The careful arrangements of *The Awkward Age* are only slightly suggested, however, by James's diagram of circles. The following analysis will attempt to describe the mutual relationships of the order of the "circles" (the books or "acts" of the novel, each of which is named for a different character). Each of the "acts" is divided into numbered units which we may, for convenience, call "scenes." There are thirty-eight such "scenes" rather evenly distributed among the ten character-named books of the novel.²

If we look at the order of characters in the table of contents (each character dominates his own book) we can confirm many of the dramatic relationships in *The Awkward Age*. The order is as follows:

I. Lady Julia	VI. Mrs. Brook
II. Little Aggie	VII. Mitchy
III. Mr. Longdon	VIII. Tishy Grendon
IV. Mr. Cashmore	IX. Vanderbank
V. The Duchess	X. Nanda

The first book is in many ways expository. Though she is deceased, Lady Julia is present in *The Awkward Age* somewhat in the style of Mrs. Newsome's absent presence in *The Ambassadors*. Both women are conspicuously maternal; both exert moral compulsion without actually being on the scene. Since Lady Julia cannot be physically placed in *The Awkward Age*, contrary

to the deliberate placement of all other characters as if they were actually on a stage,³ we can ignore her once we grant her omnipresence. We are thus left with nine books, each with a nominal head character who is physically present, and at the center of the nine appears Mrs. Brookham herself. Her importance is implied by James's description of her as "the best thing I've ever done";⁴ four figures precede, and four follow her. Interesting and suggestive is the order if we pair off the persons who come before and after her. The Duchess (Book v) and Mitchy (Book vii) are closest to Mrs. Brook (Book vi). This proximity is explained by (A) Mrs. Brook's running debate with the Duchess over their respective methods of rearing their young girls and (B) their respective campaigns to marry their young girls to Mitchy, a wealthy bachelor. Conflicts A and B relate to each other in that the Duchess matches her niece and ward with Mitchy, to Mrs. Brook's chagrin; but the Duchess' victory is Pyrrhic in that Little Aggie's innocence is besmirched after the marriage. Thus in a sense Mrs. Brook "wins" contest A and "loses" contest B, though there are ironic qualifications to these victories, just as all

¹ *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* by Henry James, Introduction by R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1934), p. 110; hereafter cited in text as *AN*.

² The dialogues of Gyp and Lavedan are immediate sources for the "form" of *The Awkward Age*, as James's Preface to this novel shows, but certainly the experience of the dramatic years is also evident in the choice of form.

³ Even Captain Dent-Douglas, who is ready at any moment to elope with Lady Fanny Cashmore, is given a specific London address, despite the fact that he is mentioned only once and never actually appears in the novel.

⁴ Mrs. Brook's exemplary insight is typified by the way she lets the Duchess know she is onto the Duchess' love affair with Petherton. Offering the Duchess some dainties from her tea table, she says, "There's one thing I mustn't forget—don't let us eat them *all*. I believe they're what Lord Pether-ton really comes for." (What he *really* comes for is, of course, the Duchess.) Mrs. Brook repeats the innuendo, which the Duchess continues to dodge, by saying, "We mustn't, between us, lick the platter clean" (*The Awkward Age*, New York, 1958, p. 38; hereafter cited in text as *AA*). When Mrs. Brook implies a bit more openly that she knows something (p. 40), the Duchess counters with an allusion to Vanderbank, Mrs. Brook's protégé. The Duchess is a formidable adversary, as Mrs. Brook well knows, but Mrs. Brook is her superior. She says to Nanda, speaking of clothes, "I never stick in a pin without thinking of your cousin Jane [the Duchess]. . . . 'Our antagonist is our helper—he prevents our being superficial' " (p. 214).

gains and losses in the novel have their ironic offsets.

Cashmore (Book iv) and Tishy (Book viii) also find a "center" in Mrs. Brook; the common ground is her daughter Nanda. Cashmore, Mrs. Brook, and Tishy (Books iv, vi, and viii) focus on Nanda alone, unlike the double concern of the Duchess, Mrs. Brook, and Mitchy (Books v, vi, and vii) with both Aggie and Nanda. Cashmore feels he is in love with the girl, and wants to prove the lapse of his infatuation with Carrie Donner by showering his attentions upon Nanda. It is at Tishy Grendon's that the "affair" between Nanda and Cashmore has developed, even further than Mrs. Brook has realized. The company Nanda keeps at Tishy's indeed discredits Nanda in the eyes of many. It is this "connection" with Cashmore—the fact, even, of Cashmore's private visits to Nanda—that puts Vanderbank off from seeing her on the final occasion when he might have proposed marriage to her (Book ix, Scene xxxi). At this time Mrs. Brook serves her own case, at her daughter's expense, more callously than ever before. With the end of the scene, she insists that Van find out for himself whether Nanda "likes" Cashmore; the suggestiveness kills whatever remains of Van's trust in Nanda's innocence after it is climactically discredited at Tishy's. On that occasion Mrs. Brook publicly announces that Nanda has read an improper French novel, a dramatic prop that serves to blacken Aggie's reputation as well. Books iv, vi, and viii emphasize, then, the dubious morality of a close friend (Tishy) and of an admirer of Nanda (Cashmore), as well as the extraordinary selfhood of Nanda's mother.

Books iii and ix, Longdon's and Vanderbank's, may also be said to focus on Mrs. Brook (Book vi). First, Longdon's fundamental dislike for the inveterate hostess is offset by Vanderbank's adulation of her. Secondly, Longdon's affinity for Nanda, Mrs. Brook's daughter, contrasts with Van's inability to love the girl. Thirdly, Mrs. Brook "works" Longdon by appealing to his love for her dead mother Lady Julia, and, infatuated herself with Van, she prevents his advantageous marriage to Nanda (it was to have been well-dowered by Longdon). Longdon and Vanderbank themselves may be paired. They are close friends in that Longdon once loved the younger man's mother; this, together with Longdon's deep feeling for Lady Julia, Nanda's grandmother, is his basis for wishing Nanda and Van to marry. His case is much strengthened by Nanda's very real love for Van.

Books ii and x, Aggie's and Nanda's, are first

and last if we disregard Book I, "Lady Julia," on grounds already mentioned. The contrast between the continental *jeune fille* and the "modern" English girl suggests a basis of composition in the novel that divides it into contending halves. Another kind of rival halves emerges if we note, first, that the even-numbered books of *The Awkward Age* contain the more highly social scenes, which Mrs. Brook dominates as the hostess of her own tea table (Books ii, iv, and vi) or which she dominates as the most brilliant guest at Tishy Grendon's dinner party (Book viii). This "social" sequence ends with Book viii, the revelation at Tishy's; Nanda's own Book x is her signally private, almost introspective communing, first with Van, then with Mitchy, and last of all with Longdon, the three most important persons in her life.

We may note secondly, and conversely, that the odd-numbered books of the novel tend to be dominated by Longdon, the moral antagonist of Mrs. Brook. Lady Julia, whom Longdon still loves in memory, dominates Book i; iii is Longdon's own; v is the Duchess', who thinks (mistakenly) that Longdon's dislike of Mrs. Brook has made him come round to helping her make the match between Aggie and Mitchy.⁵

The books of the novel that are pro-Longdon are less highly "scenic"⁶ than are Mrs. Brookenham's. It may be an over-extension of the case to say that Longdon's books are closer to being "pictures" in the sense of the picture-versus-scene distinction that James makes in his Preface to *The Ambassadors* (AN, pp. 322–326). Longdon's books are expressive, however, of the more idealistic, less opportunistic values of the novel, though these virtues do not of themselves necessarily bring about morally desirable relationships. The greatest failure of such high-minded intentions comes from Nanda's getting Mitchy to marry Aggie. In her wish to save both persons morally through the marriage, she

⁵ The Duchess frankly proposes at this time that Longdon dower Nanda's marriage to Vanderbank. Soon after, Longdon announces such an offer to Van.

⁶ In a letter to Mrs. W. K. Clifford (1901) about a play of hers just published in *Nineteenth Century* James remarks, "I don't think it a scenic subject at all; I think it bears all the mark of a subject selected for a tale and done as a play as an after-thought. I don't see, that is, what the scenic form does, or *can* do, for it, that the narrative couldn't do better—or what it, in turn, does for the scenic form. The inwardness is a kind of inwardness that doesn't become an outwardness—effectively—theatrically; and the part played in the whole by the painting of the portrait seems to me the kind of thing for which the play is a non-conductor" (*The Selected Letters of Henry James*, edited with an Introduction by Leon Edel, New York, 1960, pp. 148–149; hereafter cited as *SL*).

causes Mitchy, who loves her, deep and lasting pain, and she leads Aggie, who trusts her, into public disgrace. Nanda intended that the marriage would free Mitchy of his ugly exploitation by Petherton; instead, it provides Petherton with a further, more serious means of injury—the seduction of Aggie after she becomes Mitchy's wife.

The contention that exists between Mrs. Brook's brilliantly conversational "scenes" and Longdon's more solemnly discoursing "pictures" is over Nanda and Van. Mrs. Brook dominates her scenes because Nanda is after all her own daughter and because Van is the chief ornament of her social circle. Longdon too has his claims, by way of his love for Van's mother and for Nanda's grandmother, a sentiment of older traditional values which Mrs. Brook has negated but which Nanda transmutes into her own awkward-age manner of expression.

As we have already noted, there is a standing debate between Mrs. Brook and the Duchess about the proper method of rearing young girls.⁷ Ironically, each parent is finally deceived, or believes herself to be, of the efficacy of her method. Nanda, "over-exposed" as a "modern" daughter, is in moral ascendancy at the end of the novel, a fact unknown to her mother, who does not accept her daughter's moral values anyway. Nanda pleads the case of her mother's youth and love of society to both Van and Mitchy, who have been neglecting Mrs. Brook after the smash she deliberately brought on at Tishy's. Nanda gets Mitchy and Van to promise to go back to Mrs. Brook's again, even though she herself has suffered most from her mother's abusiveness.

Contrary to Nanda, who like her younger predecessor in James's fiction, Maisie, knows "everything" too soon in life, little Aggie knows "nothing" before her marriage to Mitchy. Despite Nanda's own plea that all girls should be reared to be as blank a page as Aggie, this up-bringing does not serve Aggie at all in matrimony. It leaves her an apparently willing, though possibly also unwitting, victim, of her aunt's lover. Petherton takes up with the niece once she is "safely" married and can have lovers as she pleases; London society gives her the accepted examples of Carrie Donner and Lady Fanny.

Thus, even if Mrs. Brook fails to match Mitchy and her own Nanda, she is in one sense vindicated by the failure of Aggie's marriage to him, and finally, in her role as adviser to disappointed wives and husbands, she will have the consolation of ministering to the needs of both Aggie and

Mitchy. Mrs. Brook also has the satisfaction, for what it may be worth to her and apparently that is a great deal, of seeing the Duchess horribly compromised by her own lover when he deserts her and exploits the innocent niece, *bien élevée* by the Duchess herself. It has been Mrs. Brook's contention and grief that the Duchess never has to pay for anything, but certainly the Duchess pays at last, and most severely, when her own indulgences find out and overtake the morally spotless niece.

The truly significant structure of *The Awkward Age* depends upon James's placement and handling of "scene." Thus far we have noted only the structural hints in the table of contents, which gives the nominal centers of each book. Let us now look at the cues, the entrances, the contacts or conflicts, and the exits whereby the scenes themselves are defined in the novel. I choose those books which are most highly "scenic" (II, IV, VI, and VIII, ones partisan to Mrs. Brook). Though not severely applied in *The Awkward Age*, the effect upon the novel of French classical-style drama is evident, in which each entrance and exit marks a scenic division. An early play by James, *A Change of Heart*, strictly follows this form. The result is that in a very short play, fifteen scenes are required.⁸ James's interest in the French theatre lasts far beyond his young manhood, however, as any reader of his theatre essays will observe; the following analysis of scenes in *The Awkward Age* attempts to show the effect that James's knowledge of the drama had upon the form that this novel took.⁹

The heroine of Book II, "Little Aggie," is a static figure until Book VIII. The drama of her

⁷ Mrs. Brook sees the Duchess as an opponent, and with some reason, if we observe the course of their rivalry over which girl, Nanda or Aggie, is to marry Mitchy. In her own Book V the Duchess is plotting against Mrs. Brook in this respect, and though she does so for Nanda's "good," she is really working for her niece Aggie's interest, as is later confirmed at Tishy's dinner party (*AA*, p. 269). See n. 4 for more points of friction between these women.

⁸ See *The Complete Plays of Henry James*, edited by Leon Edel (Philadelphia, 1949), p. 101, comment by Edel. About his problems in dramatizing *The American* James observes in a letter to George W. Smalley (1891), "But I shall never again move in the straight-jacket of a novel originally conceived from a point wholly non-scenic, containing a damnable element (the machinery by which the denouement is brought about) which I had long ago outlived, and forcing one into the corner of at once keeping to it . . . at every step, to make it an organism—the drama—utterly distinct from the story-form" (*SL*, p. 114).

⁹ A convenient collection of James's essays on drama is *Henry James: The Scenic Art*, edited with an Introduction and Notes, by Alan Wade (New York, 1957).

own book thus consists of Aggie's "exposure" (she seems oblivious, though we cannot be altogether sure) to the improper types who appear at Mrs. Brook's salon, Carrie Donner and Lady Fanny Cashmore. The encounter of the types themselves, the painted mistress (though Carrie is becoming a cast-off) and the wronged wife (Fanny compensates by planning an elopement) is in itself charged with drama. Mrs. Brook so manages the meeting that Carrie and Fanny are civil to each other and even embrace, to the surprise of the other guests, who expect to see a snub or to hear a denunciation. This final scene (ix) is the high point of Book II, toward which James gradually builds.

In the first scene (iv) of Aggie's book, Harold Brookenham confesses he has filched money from his mother's Louis Quinze secretary. Harold's money problems are symptomatic of those of his family, who live beyond their means. Mrs. Brook's manner with Harold epitomizes her desire to push aside her children, since they interfere with the conversation of her salon. As the Duchess tells Longdon, "She [Mrs. Brook] must sacrifice either her daughter or what she once called to me her intellectual habits" (AA, p. 172). The subject of Mrs. Brook and her children prepares for the first topic of Mrs. Brook's conversation in Scene v with the Duchess, who disagrees with her hostess' methods of rearing a young girl. To counter the Duchess, Mrs. Brook takes note of her opponent's latest infatuation, Lord Petherton, a theme that leads into Scene vi, where it is taken up again in Mrs. Brook's talk with her husband Edward after his cousin the Duchess leaves. Next husband and wife discuss money problems, including Harold's, and their possible solution, to "work" Mr. Longdon. In Scene vii, Mrs. Brook and Mitchy speak of Harold and money again; then they consider Mitchy's hopeless love for Nanda, Nanda's love for Van (Mrs. Brook learns of it now for the first time), and Nanda's idea that Mitchy and Aggie should marry. This last matter is a cue for the reappearance of the Duchess with Aggie in tow (Scene viii). Mrs. Brook and the Duchess talk of Nanda's friendship, which the Duchess disapproves, with Tishy Grendon and her sister Carrie. Upon this cue Carrie, Cashmore's painted mistress, appears; Mrs. Brook talks with her, and James records instead the Duchess' comments to Petherton about Carrie and the outraged wife, Fanny Cashmore. At *her* cue Fanny appears (ix), and Mrs. Brook skilfully reconciles the potential rivals.

In these six continuous episodes we can ob-

serve the characteristic traits of "scene" which James borrows from the drama. Each segment is marked by the entrance of a new character and the introduction thereby of a new dramatic contrast or conflict. The new theme (or character, or both) is anticipated, however, in the preceding scene, just as at the conclusion of each episode the following one is prepared for by a comparable link. All the scenes of little Aggie's Book II (it contains six, more than any other in the novel) are strung upon a dominant theme, appropriate to the named heroine: the problems of rearing a girl and launching her into society. Other themes recur in the book to lend further continuity from scene to scene; an important one is the money problem, initially and most vulgarly Harold's, but essentially also that of the entire Brookenham family.¹⁰

Many characters of *The Awkward Age* are introduced in Book II, but central to it is, of course, Mrs. Brook (Book vi); she is intently concerned throughout Book II with matters relating to the Duchess, Mitchy, and Aggie. She meets and converses with other characters as well, but the Duchess (Book v) and Mitchy (Book vii), Mrs. Brook's predecessor and follower in the main order of books, as well as Aggie, whose book this one is, are intent participants, observers, and listeners.

The main order of books is also instrumental in plotting Book iv, Cashmore's, which is the next intensely "scenic" one in the novel. Mrs. Brook is again the center, as she is of all the "scenic" books, but her interest has shifted from the subjects of the books closest to her own (vi), who are the Duchess (v) and Mitchy (vii); now, she deals with Cashmore (iv) and Tishy (viii). These latter figures concern her during Scene XIII of Cashmore's Book iv; she is surprised to

¹⁰ Writing to Mrs. Everard Cotes in 1900, James remarks on her novel *His Honor and a Lady*, "I think your drama lacks, a little, *line*—bony structure and palpable, as it were, tense cord—on which to string the pearls of detail. It's the frequent fault of women's work—and I like a rope (the rope of the *direction and march of the subject*, the action) pulled, like a taut cable between a steamer and a tug, from beginning to end. It lapses and lapses along a trifle too liquidly—and is too *much* conceived (I think) in dialogue—I mean considering that it isn't conceived like a play" (SL, pp. 206–207). In a similar vein, James wrote to Hugh Walpole (1910) concerning the latter's *Maradick at Forty*, "The whole thing is a monument to the abuse of voluminous dialogue, the absence of a plan of composition, alternation, distribution, structure, and other phases of presentation than the dialogue—so that *line* (the only thing I value in a fiction etc.) is replaced by a vast formless featherbedness—billows in which one sinks and is lost" (SL, p. 158).

learn that Nanda, who has been seeking Cashmore at Tishy's, has not told her about it.

Another way in which Book iv differs from ii in its focus on character, while still following a comparably systematic plan, is its sole concern with Nanda. (Book ii is about both Aggie and Nanda.) Several times in Book iv Mrs. Brook is asked where Nanda is, and Cashmore, the most persistent inquirer, shows a great interest in the girl. He announces his willingness to prove he has given up Carrie Donner if Nanda will only accept his attentions. It should be remarked, incidentally, that Nanda "accepts" him because she feels thereby that he will really reform.

In Scenes xiv and xv of Book iv Mrs. Brook talks first with Vanderbank and then with Longdon. We thus notice that her sphere of interest is moving out again in the main order of books from her own center (Book vi), for Longdon is Book iii, and Vanderbank, Book ix. Nanda, who is absent throughout Book iv, is revealed at the end of it, via telegram, to be with Tishy; Mrs. Brook's vague, not altogether consistent accounts of where her daughter is¹¹ are disproved by Nanda's announcement that she will go to the opera with Tishy. Cashmore, the named center of Book iv, declares that he himself will go to the opera (to meet Nanda) since he knows which box is Tishy's.

The recurring question of Book iv, "Where is Nanda?" creates some of the dramatic tension that is built up in *The Other House*¹² during the search for Effie Bream, who is at length found drowned. Effie is still a child, and her murder is the extremity of melodrama. Nanda, however, is also young and innocent, and the growing uncertainty about where she is creates a growing anticipation over her. The fear is scarcely diminished when the unprincipled Cashmore announces his intention to track her down.

Book vi, Mrs. Brook's own, is the center of the novel, just as she herself is central to the other scenic books we have been analyzing. The thread of interest in her book is Longdon's plan, proposed at the end of Book v (The Duchess), whereby Van will marry Nanda and the girl will inherit a large fortune from Longdon. Three clear hints are given in Book vi of what is to take place later in the novel: (1) Van will refuse Longdon's offer, (2) Nanda will "profit" anyway, and (3) Mitchy will marry Aggie. During Scene xxi, the first in Book vi, Van reveals to Mrs. Brook what Longdon has proposed; the dialogue ends with her steering Van away from the marriage.¹³ Mitchy appears in Scene xxii; after Mrs. Brook tells him in front of Van of Longdon's

proposal, and after Van's momentary hesitation about his having betrayed Longdon's confidence, these three, the "inner circle," praise their own integrity for being able to keep such a secret. Scene xxiii is with Mrs. Brook and Nanda alone. They disagree about what to do with Longdon: Mrs. Brook wants to use him; Nanda wants to do for him. The selfishness and opportunism of the mother, and the generosity of the daughter, crystallize in this scene.

Book vi, then, is oriented toward Nanda (Book x); her "suitors," one whom she loves, and one who loves her, are the centers of Books vii and ix. Nanda, the extremity of exposed virtue (Book x, the last), wishes to dispose of her suitors in one way; Mrs. Brook, the dead center of opportunism and selfish compromise (Book vi, center of the "main order"), would dispose of them in the other; Mitchy (Book vii) and Van (Book ix) are the figures lying between who must be placed. Nanda "places" Mitchy (she gets him to marry Aggie); Mrs. Brook "places" Van (she discourages his proposing marriage to Nanda).

Book viii (Tishy Grendon's), the last which is intensely "scenic" in *The Awkward Age*, is as complex and socially populated as any other, but it is more loaded with impact than any earlier book; it ends with the climactic discrediting of both Nanda and Aggie before the assembled guests. Mrs. Brook, "like Samson," pulls down

¹¹ See *AA*, pp. 110, 119, 131, 135.

¹² The Protean career of *The Other House* helps to account for its unsatisfactory state as fiction. A play with an Ibsen-type heroine (Rose Armiger, a role probably intended for James's American actress friend Elizabeth Robins), a thriller-type serial in a London illustrated newspaper, and a long short story are the various shapes it took. See *The Other House*, Introduction by Leon Edel (London, 1947). In this same light, consider James's letter to H. G. Wells (1898) concerning "Covering End," a short story rewritten from a one-act play he wrote for Ellen Terry. "The B[ritish] P[ublic] won't read a play with the mere names of the speakers—so I simply paraphrased these and added such indications as might be the equivalent of decent acting—a history and an evolution that seem to me moreover explicatively and sufficiently smeared all over the thing. The moral is of course Don't write one-act plays" (*SL*, p. 147). The fiction "done over" from James's plays is little admired. I think *The Outcry* is his best adaptation, but even it is spoiled by a trivial stage ending. James's thorough competence in stage mechanics, despite his failure to write a play that really succeeded on stage, contributed in a major way to the form of his fiction after the "dramatic years." His imaginative adaptation of dramatic technique to novels *planned* as novels is the invaluable result of his experience in the theatre.

¹³ She puts the "blame" on him by implying that he will not have the initiative ever to propose to Nanda. At the end of Scene xxi, Book vi, she thrice utters, "You won't do it," as if in some sort of incantation.

the pillars of her social world in the gesture that ruins herself and both girls. Just before this catastrophe in Scene xxx, James carefully groups his characters; their physical proximity to one another is crucial to their real relationships. As Tishy's guests draw about Mitchy, who is already being contended over by Mrs. Brook and the Duchess (joined here again are the figures of the "central" books, v, vi, vii), the fate of Aggie and Nanda (the subjects of the "outer" books, ii and x) is to be determined. Converging about Mitchy, Mrs. Brook, and the Duchess, in this order, are Tishy and Longdon (their proximity is baleful; Longdon dislikes Nanda's friendship for the frivolous young wife whose husband neglects her, leaves her to make her own amusement); Mr. Cashmore and Nanda (an association that seems to confirm the worst of Longdon's fears about Tishy's effects on Nanda); Fanny Cashmore and Harold Brookenham (Nanda's brother is flattered, less innocently than his sister, by the interest of another Cashmore, the wife); Edward Brookenham, Harold's father (who ought to be concerned but apparently is not over the Cashmores, who are "lovers" of his two children); and, finally, Vanderbank. Brookenham is later to ask his wife if he ought not to question Van about the young man's intentions toward Nanda, but Mrs. Brook, with uncanny vehemence, orders him in the conclusion of Scene xxxii, Book ix, to do no such thing. Though Longdon is not standing near Van, who is "last" in the circle of figures converged about the vortex of Mitchy, Mrs. Brook, and the Duchess, Van nevertheless feels uncomfortably confronted by his would-be benefactor.

Once he has so deliberately and carefully drawn this circle of *dramatis personae*, James initiates the climax from the center, Mrs. Brook, who notes that there are two figures conspicuously absent, Aggie and Petherton.¹⁴ There are sly innuendoes about the sort of game this pair are playing; various persons make quips, but the Duchess and Mrs. Brook are the real antagonists: the aunt sees no harm in the niece's absence, Mrs. Brook needles the Duchess about it, and Tishy, the hostess, gives a painfully literal, unwittingly suggestive, account of Aggie's and Petherton's "game." Harold Brookenham regrets that an unmarried girl's presence curbs his own comments, but since this exception is only Nanda, his sister, he tends to discount her. The game is that of Aggie playing sit-upon with a blue-covered French novel lent by Van to Mrs. Brook. Petherton struggles to pull Aggie off the book, once he discovers where she has hidden it.

Their contest is a parlor enactment of Aggie's "blossoming" so abundantly and so soon after her marriage; more bluntly, it dramatizes her seduction by Petherton. The playful couple then join their converged associates, Petherton holding over his head the disputed novel, which he announces as "unfit" for Aggie to read; she, radiant and excited, boasts of the good fight she has put up in resisting him. Seduction it may have been, but now that it is over Aggie seems more gratified than seduced.

The blue-covered novel, one of the first objects Vanderbank observes upon his early arrival at Tishy's dinner party, also contributes to Nanda's public exposure. Van's name is written on the cover, and Mrs. Brook announces that he lent it to her and that she read it; this is her public admission of the irregular, but well-modulated relationship between herself and Van.¹⁵ She goes even further, however, and exposes the handwriting on the cover to be that of Nanda (who wrote the name of the man she loved); thus Nanda must confess that she too has read the book (to see if it was "proper" for Tishy; it proved not to be). The ill-repute of the novel, and of Nanda for reading it, are established when the book is caught up at the end of the scene by Cashmore, Nanda's would-be lover, and subjected to his leering "Oh, I say!"

That Nanda's guilt is only on the surface, is one of mere appearance, should be clear from what follows. In the high pitch of the moment at Tishy's, however, the girl appears as guilty as Aggie. Even Longdon momentarily shudders, for he ends the scene immediately with a ceremonious good-night to his hostess. Mrs. Brook thus accomplishes her aim of getting Longdon to send Nanda back home.¹⁶ Further consideration shows the reader, however, that Nanda, knowing

¹⁴ She thus initiates a disagreement with her traditional rival the Duchess, who has already exclaimed how "cozy" the circle is, and that someone should lock the door. The circle in this scene, "circle" to describe the habitués at Mrs. Brook's tea table, and James's own use of "circle" in his "cabalistic" diagram of *The Awkward Age* for *Harper's*, suggest the dominant schematic arrangement of the novel. Mrs. Brook even describes her feats as a hostess in terms of a circus ring.

¹⁵ See *AA*, p. 271, where the Duchess tells Longdon she believes that Van and Mrs. Brook have not actually done anything "wrong." The intimacy between Van and Mrs. Brook is not so blatant as that which exists between the Duchess and Petherton, but Edward Brookenham looks upon it with vulgar acceptance.

¹⁶ Her asking Longdon for Nanda's return is her immediate aim; her ultimate one, of course, is to demonstrate forcibly to Longdon how "depraved" Nanda's environment is. She calculates, rightly, on his "rescuing" the girl forever (by a good endowment) from imminent corruption.

the book to be lent her mother by Van, would not necessarily have suspected its being libidinous. What it proves to be when she reads it must suggest to her something less than innocence in the relationship between Van and her mother; for this reason, she refuses it as reading matter for Tishy, the neglected young wife who is easily subject to suggestion, especially suggestion of the wrong sort. Nanda's "ministering" to the needs of a moral unfortunate like Tishy and her tolerating the presence of the morally reprehensible Cashmore are interesting to contrast with Mrs. Brook's habit of diagnosing for the ills of disappointed husbands and wives. The roles of mother and daughter are not at all analogous. Mrs. Brook's is self-aggrandizing: she is the center of her circle because she perpetuates "interesting" situations (like Fanny Cashmore's imminent elopement) without letting them get out of hand (Fanny and Carrie, Cashmore's wife and mistress, meet and are tamed together over Mrs. Brook's tea table; also Harold, Mrs. Brook's son, provides Fanny with a new interest to keep her from eloping). Mrs. Brook admits that she feels like a circus equestrienne managing several horses at once; as such a figure, she is the gratified exhibitionist of her salon. In contrast, Nanda has a tea table of her own, conspicuously upstairs, which is characterized not by her need to display any cleverness, but by her wish to do for others. She wants to help Aggie escape from an ugly situation (Aggie's aunt, who is the Duchess, and Petherton hide their love affair behind Aggie's innocence); but Nanda fails badly in getting Mitchy to perform the rescue. Indeed, she also wishes to "rescue" Mitchy from Petherton's corruptness and exploitation,¹⁷ but Petherton soils Aggie too after the marriage, the one ugly feat he did not attempt while Aggie was still the *jeune fille*.

If we are pragmatists, we must grant that Longdon and Nanda are failures and that Mrs. Brook is a success. Even if the mother momentarily falters after the smash at Tishy's, Nanda arranges for Mitchy and Van to visit Mrs. Brook again on their old basis, and Nanda herself will be well apportioned by her wealthy sponsor, Mr. Longdon, just as Mrs. Brook intended. It may even be that Nanda will talk Longdon into giving Van "something" so that Van will not have "lost" by not marrying her. Given this last success, Mrs. Brook—pragmatist, opportunist, realist, call her what you will—can ask for no more. Should we read *The Awkward Age* as idealists, however, and presumably James expects us to do so because he makes Nanda and Longdon sym-

pathetic, we must grant the moral victory to the "over-exposed" modern girl¹⁸ and to the older man who finds her the physical picture of the beloved grandmother. Mr. Longdon is a fair predecessor of Strether in *The Ambassadors*: a romanticist *manqué*, a Rip Van Winkle who wakes up in an age he does not understand. Longdon and Strether are forever asking questions and forever pondering the answers they receive; the answers too are baffling since they are often given by brilliant intuitions like those of Mrs. Brook and Miss Barrace.

So far, we have noted that those books of the novel oriented toward Mrs. Brookenham are intensely "scenic"; their witty dialogue, their surface glitter, make them characteristic of society comedy on stage. We have let stand until now the tentative assumption that those books that are sympathetic toward Mr. Longdon are or contain, in contrast with Mrs. Brook's, "pictures" in the sense of this term as it is used in the Preface to *The Ambassadors*. It is a risky assumption since, as our preliminary paragraph shows, James felt all parts of *The Awkward Age* to be objective and "scenic"; he intended no going-behind for explanation. "Picture" is defined in James's Preface as "representational effect"; the two examples of "picture" he gives from *The Ambassadors* are Strether's first view of Chad at the play and Mamie Pocock's waiting the summer afternoon on the balcony of her hotel suite for Little Bilham. James defends these non-scenic episodes as having "the charm of opposition and renewal" and as creating "an intensity that fairly adds to the dramatic."

We ought not let James's apparent fondness for "scene" obscure his admission of, even admiration for, "picture" in the novel. Of *The Ambassadors* he says there are "parts [i.e., 'pictures'] that prepare, that tend in fact to over-prepare, for scenes . . . everything in it that is not scene . . . is discriminated preparation, is the fusion and synthesis of picture" (*AN*, pp. 322–323). In other words, despite his emphasis on "scenes" as the units that comprise his kind of

¹⁷ Oscar Cargill, in *The Novels of Henry James* (New York, 1961, p. 270), sees the Petherton-Mitchy relationship as having overtones of that between Lord Alfred Douglas and Oscar Wilde; Cargill believes Nanda is aware of its nature, hence her eagerness to "save" Mitchy.

¹⁸ To establish his heroine's moral superiority, James has Mitchy say of Nanda's unreturned love for Van, "Any passion so great, so complete . . . is—satisfied or unsatisfied—a life" (*AA*, p. 326). I say "moral superiority" in view of James's own view of morality as the fullest, most intense perception of life. Note, among many possible examples, his comment on George Eliot's characters (*AN*, p. 70).

novel, his novel cannot be made only of scenes, for after all it is not a stage drama. James grants of "pictures," "the finest proprieties and charms of the non-scenic may, under the right hand for them, still keep their intelligibility and assert their office" (*AN*, p. 325). And after describing the examples of "picture" in *The Ambassadors* (Chad's appearance at the play, Mamie's watch on the balcony), James says, "these are as marked an example of the representational virtue that insists here and there on being, for the charm of opposition and renewal, other than scenic" (*AN*, p. 326). He ends by praising the independent elasticity of the form of the novel—that is, he is not prescribing scene *alone* as its basic unit.

We must readily grant that the "pictures" of *The Ambassadors* are more strictly representational than are any segments of the books that look toward Longdon in *The Awkward Age*. Nevertheless, there is between Mrs. Brook's segments and Longdon's the "opposition" of tone analogous to that which exists between picture and scene in *The Ambassadors*; this balanced contrast in *The Awkward Age* creates the same effect, an "intensity" that adds to the drama of the novel. James's distinction between picture and scene is an application of a sound principle. We would not expect that he had suddenly discovered it and employed it for the first time in *The Ambassadors*; there is in fact abundant evidence of its use in *The Awkward Age*. The "pictures" of Chad and of Mamie in *The Ambassadors* are living ones. In *The Awkward Age*, Book I (Lady Julia), James uses photographs in an incidentally comparable way: Longdon is given a view of Vanderbank's mounted photographs of his friends, and even the frames are described: for example, Aggie's likeness is framed in "something that looked like crimson fur," Nanda's, "in glazed white wood." An ironic commentary, indeed, on the *jeune fille, bien élevée*, and the "free" modern girl.

To illustrate further the "picture" aspect of *The Awkward Age*, let us follow Book III, Longdon's own, to note the difference between it and Aggie's, the highly "scenic" book which precedes it. Scene x, the first in Book III, describes the arrival of a few guests at Vanderbank's for tea. Mitchy arrives early since he wants to talk privately for a moment with his host. He has been preceded by Longdon, however, and Van has not yet appeared. Longdon asks many questions and then apologizes for being so "out" of everything, whereupon Mitchy congratulates him for having arrived at the ideal age for the "pursuit"

of the London lady. "You're at the age . . . of the most exquisite form of it. Observation" (*AA*, p. 83). This is the true sense in which I feel Longdon's portions of the novel to be "pictures": he observes (as Strether observes Chad and Mamie), he has an affinity for the representational—hence his more introspective manner or "inwardness," his looking at the London world, which is strange to him, rather than actively or aggressively participating in it as, most conspicuously, does Mrs. Brook, who has a fine sense of drama and scene, and who consciously builds the activities of her salon with the scenic end in mind.

We must grant, certainly, that even Longdon's books proceed by the mechanics of scene: dialogue, and fiction-style stage directions tell us nearly all that takes place in them. Nevertheless, Longdon's response to Nanda in Scene x, when he first sees her in the life (Van has shown him her photograph in Book I), is Longdon's response to a living picture in that Nanda is the picture of her grandmother Lady Julia. The older man is so moved by his impression of the girl that he leaves the room abruptly, carrying the center of dramatic interest with him. The later scenes in this book deal with Longdon's reaction as it is separately observed by Nanda, Van, and Mitchy, but they too are presented largely as separate dialogues. Here James's method is to break into parts the tea-table gathering for a better look at personal emotion; Book III tends toward introspection, or toward the private talk of two or three characters.

Mrs. Brook's skill at scene-building can be observed in the tendency of those books oriented toward her to gather more characters as they proceed, to increase their tempo of conversation (it tends not to be tête-à-tête introspective dialogue) and to build the possibilities for climax: in the style of the circus equestrienne, this lady acquires another white horse each time she rounds the circus ring, and she may even add further performers, upon whose shoulders and surmounting all, she balances as the band plays the finale.¹⁹ Book VI is the only one directed toward Mrs. Brookenham that does not end with such a densely populated climax, and in it James, for the only time in the novel, shows Nanda and her mother engaged in a private conversation. How different the mother and daughter really are we have often been told; here we can judge for ourselves.

The next book that turns to Longdon is v, "The Duchess"; it takes place at Mertle, a

¹⁹ Mrs. Brook's circus metaphor appears on p. 126, *AA*.

country house Mitchy has rented for entertaining his friends. Nanda and Van converse alone and out of doors in Scene xvi; in xvii Longdon and Nanda converse alone in the same setting. Longdon again remarks the resemblance (formally, a pictorial representation) between Nanda and her grandmother. Scene xviii is somewhat more "social" in the sense of Mrs. Brook's society intrigue; this and xix are composed of talk between the Duchess and Longdon, in which she builds her case for Aggie's marriage to Mitchy by arguing, contrary to Mrs. Brook's plan, for Nanda's marriage to Van. Mitchy will then be left "available" for Aggie. Even here, however, the scenes are out of doors and the conversation is largely between these two persons. Scene xx is late at night, in the smoking room, during the course of which Longdon presents his ideas to Van about Van's marrying Nanda. Again, introspection and self-measurement establish the non-scenic tone.

In Book vii Longdon decides to rescue Nanda from her mother's corrupting influence just as Nanda asks Mitchy to marry Aggie and rescue the niece from the Duchess' ugly domestic arrangements. We need not look at this book (Mitchy's) scene by scene, but what we have thus far observed of the pro-Longdon books still applies. The setting is Beccles, Longdon's beautifully old-fashioned country home. The encounters again are dialogues between two persons; there are no great social scenes, no salon-gatherings.

Book ix, "Vanderbank," is at Mrs. Brook's, through whose rooms a belated trickle of old friends proceeds as she engages in some desperate and unbecoming manipulation to spite Nanda and to "work" Longdon. Mrs. Brook's feat at Tishy's (in the preceding book) has temporarily broken up that friendship, but Longdon has been sending Nanda books again. He appears in the last scene of Book ix and learns from Mitchy that Mrs. Brook has virtually ruined her association with her own friends, Mitchy and Van, just as she has ruined Nanda's chances with Van.

It may be observed that Book ix is more characteristic of Mrs. Brook than it is of Longdon, even though our general assumption about *The Awkward Age* has been that the odd-numbered books look to Longdon rather than to Lady Julia's daughter. Yet we have noticed earlier, too, that the last book in the even-numbered sequence, Nanda's, is not in the character of the other even-numbered books, which turn toward Mrs. Brookenham. If we plot our scheme once more of dividing the main order of books between

Mrs. Brook and Mr. Longdon, we can conclude thus:

Mrs. Brook	Mr. Longdon
II. Little Aggie	I. Lady Julia
IV. Mr. Cashmore	III. Mr. Longdon
VI. Mrs. Brook	V. The Duchess
VIII. Tishy Grendon	VII. Mitchy
IX. Vanderbank	X. Nanda

If the orientation of the last two books, "Vanderbank" and "Nanda," is out of step with the dominant plan of even versus odd numbers, it is entirely consistent with the final disposition of Van and Nanda themselves. Van promises to return for regular visits to Mrs. Brook; he will never marry Nanda, and Longdon has given up hopes of encouraging him to do so. Nanda is leaving her home forever, and will live at Beccles, or wherever else Mr. Longdon chooses to take her should he decide to travel; her allegiance is final and decisive too, even though her mother has told her that charity begins at home. The break in the dominant pattern of even versus odd-numbered books is characteristic of James, who, though fond of form and masterly in his adherence to it, also knew that doggedly following a pattern ruins the total effect.

For some readers, *The Awkward Age* is a too-consciously wrought work of art. My own feeling is that there is more than enough variation within its elaborate form to render it plausible and pleasing. The danger of an analysis like the present one, which calls attention to the patterns that persist throughout the novel, is that it may seem to make the novel a game of double acrostics, ingenious but pointless. Used as a means to understanding rather than as an end in themselves, the cabalistic diagrams can, however, increase one's awareness of the contrasts and conflicts in *The Awkward Age*.

It is well to repeat that the form of this novel, like those of others by James, is an expression of its moral values. We have noted that Mrs. Brook represents the center of living values, opportunism or pragmatism or ingenious selfhood that is not guilty of flagrant moral violations. Aggie, the first living value (I follow the main order of books) is cloistered virtue corrupted by its first meeting with experience. Nanda, the last living person in the order of books, is virtue over-exposed, but ultimately uncorrupted. Lady Julia, who is dead, figures in the first book: she is beautiful but impossible as an earthly ideal; her earthly image is Nanda. Thus Mr. Longdon, Book iii, succeeds a dead ideal and a cloistered virtue. He sharply clashes with Cashmore, Book

iv, who is unprincipled aggression. The Duchess, Book v, is more circumspect and clever in her immorality, but not sufficiently so to avoid being found out by her superior rival Mrs. Brookenham, Book vi. Mitchy (Book vii) is immoral enough and wealthy enough not to have to worry about social acceptance, but at his center, as Mrs. Brook shrewdly observes, there is something kind and good. Mitchy's moral inanition (he must suffer because of Nanda to be redeemed) reappears more intensely in Tishy Grendon (viii), who wants love and who falters between the advice of her fallen sister Carrie and that of her kind good friend Nanda. Vanderbank, Book ix, is the extreme example of moral inanition. He has a love affair of sorts with Mrs. Brook that is kept in hand by their mutual fear of compromise. He likes Longdon's offer of money, but he backs away from it for fear of being thought bribed. He likes Nanda, but he lets Mrs. Brook talk him out of permitting his liking to become anything more. Inanition reduces him to jealousy. Mitchy sees that Van is jealous of him for being able to love Nanda so deeply and so without reserve, and it is this love alone that saves Mitchy in spite of his unhappy marriage. Though Van is supposed to be a thoroughly likeable young man, he occupies somewhat of the same position as that of Tony Bream in *The Other House*: he is adored by too many people and does not know which way to turn.

Thus in the most highly "scenic" portions of *The Awkward Age* we observe the opportunism

of Mrs. Brook asserting itself and endangering the idealism that centers primarily in Mr. Longdon, and that is aided by Nanda. The pro-Longdon books alternate with the scenic ones and are attempts to recoup, in a less aggressive, dramatic way, the ground lost to Mrs. Brook in the scenic encounters. Longdon's books are only occasionally "pictorial" in the full sense of James's term, but since they are more subdued and introspective it is natural that they incline toward pictorial representation. One may conclude that the tug of war between Mrs. Brook and Longdon, a moral conflict, is itself dramatized by the counterbalanced form of *The Awkward Age*.

It is odd that *The Tragic Muse* (1890), whose subject matter is theatre and the drama, should have a far looser, more undramatic form than all of the later and many of the earlier novels. After the failure of *Guy Domville*, James's long fiction takes on a more consciously dramatic form. The difference is not absolute, for he has always adjured himself, "Dramatize, dramatize!" Still, he knows much better how to follow that advice after the theatre years, and in no novel can he be said to do so more intensely than in *The Awkward Age*. Nor does the effect wear off. The contrast between dramatic "scene" and representational "picture" is fundamental to the form of the major-phase novels themselves.

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